

Strong law needed to protect CIA

CIA RENEGADE Phillip Agee long ago forfeited any claims to the role of legitimate critic of either his former employer or his country.

A self-professed "Revolutionary Socialist," Agee has converted his loathing for the American intelligence community and its mission into a crusade to expose the identity of agents and generally discredit the agency at every opportunity.

Since resigning from the Central Intelligence Agency in 1969, Agee has published a book which purported to disclose the identities of nearly 250 persons he described as agency officers, foreign agents and informers. He is reportedly preparing a second book which, he says, will include the names of additional hundreds of CIA and National Security Agency personnel.

Agee is also involved in the publication of a newsletter, the chief purpose of which is to undermine American intelligence gathering efforts by telling CIA secrets.

AT THE RECENT Communist-sponsored world festival of youth and students in Havana, Agee announced his intention of publicly identifying as many CIA operatives stationed outside the United States as possible.

The question is: What can or should the U.S. government do about Phillip Agee?

Last year, the Justice Department announced it could find no grounds for prosecuting Agee under the Espionage Act for his disclosure of CIA secrets. It could, presumably, file appropriate civil charges against Agee for breach of contract in that he violated his employee secrecy oath he signed when he joined the CIA.

But for Agee and others like him, whose disclosures of classified information are clearly intended to harm the national interest, something strong is needed.

SEN. LLOYD M. BENTSEN, D-Texas, favors passage of legislation that would make unauthorized disclosure of the identity of a CIA agent a federal crime. If the Espionage Act cannot prevent or punish the sort of destructive activity Agee is guilty of, Congress ought to enact legislation that can.

Armed with such a law, and further evidence of Agee's continued subversive activity, the Justice Department could seek his indictment and extradition should he fail to return to the United States.